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Atari Online News, Etc.
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A-ONE #0312 03/23/01

~ Florida Sues CIS! ~ People Are Talking! ~ 1GHz Notebooks!
~ Can Spam Wars Be Won?! ~ Cybercrime Quandary! ~ HailStorm Unleashed!
~ Amazon Going Bankrupt? ~ MagicNet and More! ~ E0Business Drive!
~ Lycos Shuts Down Sites ~ Intel's Crusoe-Crusher ~ XTOS Clone Info!

-* Congress Buried Under E-Mail *-

-* Web Site Ads Getting More Intrusive *-
-* Libraries Take On Child Web Protection Act *-

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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Sorry, Joe, but I’m definitely sick of winter! Someone please grab that fat groundhog in Pennsylvania and throttle it, but good! To add insult to injury, we’re in the midst of another winter storm watch. But, it’s mostly rain in our area, not snow. Many are wishing that it was snow! The flooding is unbelievable in my area. Streets are now rivers, basements are flooded (mine is bone dry, fortunately), and yards look like swamps. It’s been raining for almost 24 hours now, and forecast to continue off and on until some time today. Not good.

Hate spam? Well, it appears that the U.S. Congress might just past a tough anti-spamming bill shortly. It’s about time! I view spam as bad as telemarketing calls - both unsolicited and unwanted nuisances. I hope that this bill is passed expediently and utilized to its fullest. There is occasionally some justice in the world!

We’ve got lost of news this week, so I’ll cut this week’s comments short. I’m sure I’ll be able to make up for it in the coming weeks!

Until next time...

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XTOS Clone Information!

New information is finally up on the XTOS site.
The details are only in german so far though.
A short list of specifications are listed.

Specifications:

AGP (Graphics card)

PCI (SCSI, general expansion cards)

USB 1.1 (Generally, keyboard and mouse. PS2 falls)

MIDI (on board)

ETHERNET (Doubly: 10mbit + 100mbit)

RS232 (Doubly)

SD-RAM (Two sockets, max. 512 MB)
URL in German: http://www.xtos.de/detail_d.htm

MagicNet & More Released

Jan Daldrup of place2be.de reports that Vassilis Papathanassiou has released a large number of updates as well as the long ago announced MagicNet.

MagiCNet is compatible to MiNTNet on the socket level. This means that clients which don‘t use specific MiNT features will work with MagiCNet without the need of recompiling (e.g. aFTP and aMail).

Also released are:

FTP-Server 1.08 - with new functions

Y2k patches

BNeT 3.03 - Speed improvements

Ethernet Driver 1.06

All programs support MagicNet now as well.

URL: http://users.otenet.gr/~papval/

Czuba Tech Web Site Updated

Mr Czuba mailed this out...

Hello,

My web site was updated:

- new list of things I sell.
- new CTT60 for TT030.
- CT60 : new performance tables (TT030 and Medusa T40 were added)
- new ’FALCON REPAIR’ area : see it !

I need some accounts :

if I repaired your falcon and you want to tell how you were satisfied, please write me !

- new links pages.

URL: http://www.czuba-tech.com/

DGEM 0.12 Released

Pierre TONTHAT reports on comp.sys.atari.st...

Bonjour :)

Rajah Lone, Daroou and Mateo invite you all to discover the new release of DGEM 0.12, product of the french group Renaissance.

News since the first 0.10 version:
- new labyrinth
- Falcon XBIOS compatible sound routines.
- first wall and floor items (mostly ornamentation)
- invisible pits, second wall texture
- iconification, desk background, bugfixes...

You can download it at http://www.multimania.com/nef or directly at http://www.multimania.com/nef/files/dgem012.zip (300Kb).

Coming next: doors, wall inscriptions, switches and maybe teleporters.

Hope you'll enjoy our work :)

A bientot

Pierre

DGEM is a GEM program that uses the original Dungeon Master graphics files

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and this time spring has finally sprung. Of course Mother Nature had another surprise for us here in the Northeast. That's right... a good ol' fashioned Nor' Easter. Thank goodness it's warm enough that it showed itself as rain and not snow.

I suppose that you're familiar with Mark Twain's comment: "Everyone talks about the weather, but no one ever does anything about it". It's absurd, of course, but it speaks to one of the basic parts of human nature... That feeling of helplessness that we all feel sometimes. Things that are beyond our control worry us. Our ancestors weren't the biggest, fastest, or most long-lived of the animal kingdom. In fact, we may only have survived and persevered because we don't taste good.

Whatever the reason, we got to where were are today despite the things that we couldn't control.

What's the lesson here? Quite seriously, I haven't a clue. Let's just say that you can triumph despite uncertainty and circumstances beyond your control.

I've been thinking about this a lot lately, since my job is getting more and more crazy. We're all seeing it these days. I'm usually an "up

the establishment" kind of guy, but it’s not just the establishment. It’s just about every facet of our lives.

Just hang in there, and you’ll do fine. Besides, it’s either tread water or sink, right? I’ll take treading water every time.

Now let’s get on with the news and STuff from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Our own Rob Mahlert posts this about our current web page survey:

"Visit www.AtariNews.org and answer the poll question... What Is Important In An Atari Clone?"

Lonny Pursell takes a realistic stance and tells Rob:

"I would say the #1 thing would be the ability to actually purchase the said clone."

Hallvard Tangeraas tells Lonny:

"Hehe.. well said!
Atari software compatibility would be nice too."

Lyndon Amsdon adds:

"My opinion is to not spend too long trying to get ST software to work on it. I personally think that the best option is a TT clone, but with a DSP. I would have to be able to run Falcon programs that use the DSP, but have the stability of a TT, along with a VME for the Galaxy. Built in midi expander too, as it’s so easy to implement in the design, you’d be stupid leaving it out."

Lyndon Amsdon asks about DVDs on an Atari:

"I haven’t seen this question asked so I thought I would.

Is it possible to use DVDs on any Atari or TOS clone?

I don’t have a clue what format they are in so I can’t see if any software would work with them.

It’s the films I’m interested in, not CDs with programs on them.

Surely a Hades/Milan can do this."

’Oracle’ tells Lyndon:

"You need serious cpu power to decompress dvd video.
It’s impossible any atari computer would be able to do it at a satisfactory rate."

Lyndon replies:

"Surely an 060 (CT60?/Hades/Milan) could do it, maybe not as good a PC, but if we had a program that did do it, then this would force people to make faster hardware to keep up with the pressure the software is

putting on the computer.

Or am I wrong? This is the way PCs move on."

Jo Even Skarstein tells Lyndon:

"There’s no way a 060 can do this. Even the fastest (most optimized) decoders on PC’s needs at least a 266Mhz PII or similar. A PPC-based clone shouldn’t have any problems though, as long as it has a fast bus.

However, a PCI decoder card that can talk directly to a PCI graphics card should work fine on a Hades or Milan.

The problem is drivers. DVD-movies are encrypted and keys have to be licensed. This is *very* expensive."

Pascal Ricard jumps in and posts:

"Ok for the movies point of view. But DVD is not just for movies, even if it looks to be the most popular. It would be great to have a support at least for data, I mean for "plain" DVD-Rom. DVD is "just" an extended CD or did I miss something?"

Christopher Friend adds:

"DVD’s use the UDF file format...The same format that is used for CDR/CDRW’s that have been written to using packet software like DirectCD. If the ST/TT/Falcon line has a UDF File System driver then it will be able to see the files on DVD-ROM/DVD-Video discs (still won’t play the video though)."

Jo Even jumps back in and posts:

"HD-Driver supports DVD AFAIK, but I’m not sure if there’s any support for the DVD filesystem on our platform. It shouldn’t be a problem to support this under MiNT and MagiC though."

Dolan Morrison asks about multi-tasking:

"I have a 4mb STe and I want to run two programmes at the same time. Will Multitos allow me to do this and where will I find a copy?"

Steve Sweet tells Dolan:

"MultiTOS is a pretty old hack, you’d do better in my opinion to source a second hand copy of MAGIC. Loads more advantages, in my opinion."

John Lydon asks about "hacking" an Atari:

"Having owned two 1040STFMs over many years, and having quite a bundle of software for it, these days it mostly occupies space in a closet. So, I dug it out last year, and I started digging up tech documents, thinking that I would tinker with it until I broke it completely. I put in a HD/DD switch, changed the mouse to a BUS Mouse, now I’m trying to figure out how to rig a keyboard to it without buying hardware.

I found Vezz’s excellent Hardware Hacks site, and was immediately intrigued by what I could (and could not do) with this old hardware. My list of projects began:

1) Upgrade the color to 32K colors
2) Upgrade the RAM to at 4 megs (a 16 meg project was available as well)
3) Build an ethernet controller and run it as a "net station"
4) Build the IDE controller interface, and add a big fat IDE hard drive and CDROM
5) Increase the speed
6) Upgrade the TOS to 2.06

After looking at all that I would have to do to finish this total hack, I stopped and thought about it. What was I trying to do? I was trying to get this machine up to some kind of usable condition, so that I could use it along side of my IBM PC (an Athlon 500 with all the bells and whistles).

Is it worth it? Or should I just restrain myself, and play with emulators?"

Mark Bedingfield tells John:

"Emulator's PAH, the real thing is much more satisfying. I have 3 STFMs, 1 is seriously hacked. Overscan, TOS 2.06, HD floppy (auto switching), high speed serial 2.5 meg (soon 4). I still have more to do, but god its fun if you can afford the bits....."

Well folks, that's it for this week. I know it's quite short, but I'm treading water myself right now, and others must be as well, because the newsgroup postings have been a bit thin this week.

Please tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Game Boy Advance Debuts!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Aliens! 'Extermination'!
'Antz Racing'! Aidyn Chronicles!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Nintendo Unleashes New Game Boy on Admiring Fans

Millions of children -- and children at heart -- got a new gadget to dream

for on Wednesday when Nintendo’s hotly hyped Game Boy Advance console hit the shops in Japan to rave reviews.

Nintendo Co Ltd. is banking on the Advance to cement its dominance in the handheld sector and to further its vision of simple, fun-to-play games that has made its characters like the Mario Brothers and Pokemon favorites around the world.

Game fans ranging from children to suit-wearing businessmen queued up from the early hours in Tokyo’s Akihabara electronics district, and shops reported brisk initial sales of the 9,800 yen ($80) machine, successor to the best-selling Game Boy Color.

‘‘I can’t get enough of Nintendo since I was five," said Gary Young, a 23-year-old Briton on a business trip to Tokyo. ‘‘It’s just fun, it’s just pure."

Kazuhiro Katayama, a 44-year-old father of two, had another reason for his shopping expedition.

‘‘If kids don’t have the games, they feel alienated from their friends," he said, dutifully handing over a wad of notes for two consoles and accompanying games.

Nintendo is counting on loyal fans like Young and harried parents like Katayama to prove its philosophy that the future of gaming is simple, fun and cheap, in contrast to the stunning realism and huge costs that go into games for consoles like Sony Corp’s PlayStation 2.

Cumulative sales of the original Game Boy topped 100 million last year -- making it the most popular game device in the world -- and the company plans to ship 1.1 million units of the new version in March, with a target of 24 million by next spring.

Analysts say that lofty target is reachable thanks to a lack of competition in the handheld sector, and shops reported brisk initial demand on Wednesday with most selling out within hours.

Buyers in Akihabara were spotted snapping up as many as five new games for the console, taking advantage of Nintendo’s beefy initial line-up of 25 titles, while others wandered around disconsolately after turning up too late to get a console.

‘‘People were lining up from 8 p.m. on Tuesday and at any given time there were about 70-80 people lined up inside the store," said Toshiyuki Fukuda, manager of LAOX, a major electronic goods store in Akihabara.

‘‘The response was better then I expected, although about a thousand were camped outside the store for the PS2."

The sleek new machine boasts a display screen 50 percent bigger than the old model and has a 32-bit processing chip, making it as powerful as the old PlayStation.

It also enables users to hook up to their cell phones to download software, while a new ‘‘card-e" system to be available later this year will give players the chance to download characters from specially coded cards.

Another key function is its ability to link up with Nintendo’s next

offering in the home console market, which it hopes will give it a vital edge over Sony and market newcomer Microsoft Corp.

Nintendo’s GameCube will go on sale later in the year in direct competition with Sony’s mighty PlayStation 2 and Microsoft’s planned XBox console.

Hot competition in the home console market, against a backdrop of slowing sales and huge development costs, has already claimed one victim this year with the withdrawal of Japan’s Sega Corp from the hardware business.

Industry analysts say there may only be room for two survivors, although with its loyal fan base Nintendo looks well placed to be among them.

THQ Ships ‘‘Aliens: Thanatos Encounter’’ for Game Boy Color

THQ Inc. and Fox Interactive announced the release of ‘‘Aliens: Thanatos Encounter" for Game Boy Color.

Inspired by ‘‘Aliens," one of the most successful science fiction movie series in Hollywood history, ‘‘Aliens: Thanatos Encounter" for Game Boy Color is now available at major retail outlets nationwide.

‘‘The ‘Aliens’ franchise has had a following since it was first introduced as a major motion picture and continues to enjoy tremendous consumer awareness," stated Germaine Gioia, vice president, licensing, THQ. ‘‘We are delighted to be working with Fox Interactive to add this high-profile property to THQ’s extensive Game Boy Color library."

‘‘‘Aliens: Thanatos Encounter’ marks the first time the franchise will be available on Game Boy Color," stated Karly Young, executive director of marketing, Fox Interactive. ‘‘We’re thrilled to be working with THQ in bringing the successful franchise to the most popular handheld system available."

Inspired by Hollywood’s most successful science fiction property, ‘‘Aliens: Thanatos Encounter" for Game Boy Color features 12 exciting levels of action-packed gameplay with five playable Marines to choose from. Players join up with the elite Marine battalion to rescue remaining civilians from many unique alien types on the large space freighter, Thanatos. As players explore the various levels, incinerators, grenade launchers and pulse rifles are just a few of the 12 different weapons and pick-ups used to blast away enemies.

Extermination Mutates Onto PlayStation2

Sony Computer Entertainment America announced the Summer 2001 release of Extermination, a dynamic action-thriller, available exclusively for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system.

Developed by Deep Space, Inc., Extermination is spawn from the creator of MegaMan, Ghouls and Ghosts and TOMBA! and from the executive producer of Bio Hazard.

With its innovative gameplay design, heart-pounding excitement and intense cinematics, Extermination delivers the action-movie experience of the summer.

Players must navigate through intricate level designs using ‘‘on-the-fly" decision making and strategic survival tactics to outlast and defeat a deadly mutant virus. In order to deliver the utmost realism, Deep Space, Inc., collaborated with weapons expert, Ichiro Nagata, who is recognized as an expert in his field and is a writer and photographer for Combat Magazine. Mr. Nagata is licensed to participate in FBI and SWAT weapons training and brought invaluable knowledge to the making of Extermination.

Players may customize their weapon, the Special Purpose Rifle 4 (SPR4), with several different types of upgrades, including a tactical grip, grenade launcher, flame thrower, shotgun unit, zoom and night scopes among many other components. Combining realistic combat experience with the compelling storyline, Extermination encourages players to use appropriate weapons and tactical planning for the situation at hand.

‘‘Extermination utilizes the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system’s phenomenal power to fill environments with rich textures, fluidly animated creatures, unique gameplay elements and pulse-heightening music.

Gamers will certainly appreciate the spectacular visual scenes, sophisticated weaponry and intense action," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc.

‘‘Extermination is like a suspenseful action movie that is going to test the mettle of even the most skilled player with its treacherous mutant creatures, challenging puzzles, and terrifying gameplay."

At a top-secret military station in Antarctica, Extermination sets the stage for the mission to save mankind from a virus that infects both organic and inorganic objects. Playing as U.S. Special Forces Marines RECON team ‘‘Red Light" member Dennis Riley, players brave unforgiving blizzards and intense pressure situations on a mission through a military base only to discover this biological disaster. Surviving all out carnage is a core element of Extermination, but strategic planning is essential for coming home. Dennis must defeat the mutant creatures and exterminate the virus, before he becomes infected and mutates.

Through the technological capabilities of PlayStation 2, Extermination features enhanced player environments with adverse weather conditions, interactive environments and an extensive collection of creatures and weapon accessories. See the action through a chilling third person view, or an all too real first person view while aiming your weapon. Like a gripping movie, Extermination uses cinematic cut scenes to portray the incredible story of mankind’s possible extermination.

The independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has not yet rated Extermination.

Empire Interactive and Light and Shadow Production Sign Global Joint Publishing and Distribution Deal for Antz Racing

Empire Interactive, the UK based computer games developer and publisher, and LSP, the French videogame publisher announced that they will be

co-publishing Antz Racing, across Sony Playstation 2, Xbox, Gameboy Advance and PC formats.

Antz Racing features the characters from the DreamWorks hit animated film Antz. The film was the first CGI animated feature from DreamWorks Pictures. The movie captured the hearts of audiences with it’s antz-eye view into the world of insects, a world brought to life by the technical wizards of PDI/DreamWorks, the company’s Palo Alto-based computer animation division. Antz established a new standard of animation with excitement, humour, and superb visual quality.

In Antz Racing, a major racing contest is organized to prove that there is, indeed, a better place -- Insectopia! All the insect tribes take part in a championship series, which lasts throughout the four seasons: summer, autumn, winter and spring. Take the wheel behind amazing vehicles, such as sardine tins and soda cans, and prepare yourself to beat our resourceful hero Z, the gorgeous Princess Bala, the master manipulator General Mandible, Colonel Cutter, Azteca, and the good-hearted Weaver. Face your intrepid competitors in five different worlds: the Anthill, the Forest Park, the Frozen Pond, the City, and Insectopia. Pick up bonuses along the way and avoid giant obstacles and hazards, including huge holes, bumps, sticky jam, rocks, nails and oil. May the best player win!

Empire Interactive’s CEO Ian Higgins said, ‘‘This is a great coup for us to publish such a major Hollywood property. It also represents a major endorsement of our development and global publishing expertise."

Jean-Claude Goulon, of Light and Shadow Production stated, ‘‘LSP have successfully released four interactive products based on the Antz property so far. This fascinating DreamWorks license is highly anticipated by gamers throughout the world on Next Generation consoles and will come close to the CGI movie experience."

THQ Ships ‘‘MTV Sports: T.J. Lavin’s Ultimate BMX" for PlayStation

THQ Inc. announced the release of ‘‘MTV Sports: T.J. Lavin’s Ultimate BMX" for PlayStation.

Featuring two-time X-Games BMX dirt champion, T.J. Lavin, this action sports game is loaded with professional riders, trick combos and huge environments across dirt, vert and street disciplines. The action sports title is available today at retail outlets nationwide.

‘‘BMX is one of the fastest-growing extreme sports in America," stated Michael Rubinelli, vice president, development, THQ. ‘‘And we feel we’ve captured the very essence of the sport with ‘MTV Sports: T.J. Lavin’s Ultimate BMX.’ From expansive terrain to stellar graphics to insane tricks, it’s all there."

In ‘‘MTV Sports: T.J. Lavin’s Ultimate BMX," players control one of 10 professional riders, including the reigning King of Dirt Champion, T.J. Lavin, as they perform in three distinct disciplines: Dirt, Vert and Street. Each rider has signature moves, as well as officially licensed equipment and apparel.

Developed by Blue Shift Ltd., this action sports title features 16 unique

environments and more than 50 distinct land and air tricks, groupable into thousands of combos. Complete with music by some of today's hottest bands, ''MTV Sports: T.J. Lavin's Ultimate BMX" has something for everyone.

T.J. Lavin is one of the most respected athletes on the alternative sports circuit. His 1999 and 1997 gold medal wins at ESPN's X Games reached 76 million homes. Lavin is a champion on the DK Dirt Circuit and the American Bicycle Association King of Dirt tours. He is also a vocal pro-education and anti-drug advocate serving as a great role model for teens and kids.

For more information on ''T.J. Lavin's Ultimate BMX" for PlayStation and the rest of THQ's 2001 lineup, visit www.thq.com.

THQ Ships ''Aidyn Chronicles: The First Mage"

The First Traditional Fantasy Role-Playing Game for Nintendo 64

THQ Inc. announced ''Aidyn Chronicles: The First Mage", the first traditional role-playing game (RPG) for the Nintendo 64 game system.

''Aidyn Chronicles: The First Mage" offers a sophisticated N64 RPG experience complete with deep story line, sinister characters and an arsenal of unique weapons and magic. Developed by H2O Entertainment, ''Aidyn Chronicles: The First Mage" is now available at retail outlets nationwide.

'''Aidyn Chronicles' features the kind of solid character development and engrossing story line that RPG fans long for but haven't truly experienced on the N64 platform," stated Michael Rubinelli, vice president of product development, THQ. ''We're thrilled to offer a true RPG adventure for the Nintendo 64."

''Aidyn Chronicles: The First Mage" is the epic story of a young orphan boy named Alaron on a quest to discover his true heritage. The rich, nonlinear story line takes Alaron to bustling seaports and monster-filled isles through forests, deserts and mountains.

He and his companions draw from a vast collection of items, weapons and spells throughout their journey, as they must defend themselves against dark forces that haunt every move they make.

As Alaron, the player will select up to three additional party members from a cast of 13 characters with varying skills and histories.

Throughout the journey, each member of the party will develop, creating a more complex story line involving survival, love, hate, treachery, and death! ''Aidyn Chronicles"' unique features also include a sophisticated turn-based combat system involving tactical battle elements.

For more information on ''Aidyn Chronicles: The First Mage" and the rest of THQ's 2001 lineup visit www.thq.com.

THQ Ships ''The Simpsons: Night of the Living Treehouse of Horror" for Game Boy Color

THQ Inc. and Fox Interactive announced the release of ‘‘The Simpsons: Night of the Living Treehouse of Horror" for Game Boy Color.

As the longest running prime time animated television series, ‘‘The Simpsons" continues to reach more than six million viewers a week. ‘‘The Simpsons: Night of the Living Treehouse of Horror" for Game Boy Color is based on the show’s annual Halloween television specials, ‘‘Treehouse of Horror," and is now available at major retail outlets nationwide.

‘‘‘The Simpsons’ has enjoyed unparalleled prime time animated television success and brand awareness over the past 11 years," stated Germaine Gioia, vice president, licensing, THQ. ‘‘THQ is thrilled to add the wildly recognized pop-culture icons’ Halloween misadventures to our extensive hand held library."

‘‘THQ’s success in the Game Boy Color category makes them the perfect publishing partner for our powerful entertainment properties including ’Aliens,’ ’Buffy’ and of course, ’The Simpsons,"’ stated Dave Shaw, vice president of marketing, Fox Interactive. ‘‘With millions of dedicated Simpsons and Game Boy Color fans, ’The Simpsons: Night of the Living Treehouse of Horror’ is sure to be a hit on Game Boy Color."

Following the Simpsons annual Halloween Treehouse of Terror episodes, ‘‘The Simpsons: Night of the Living Treehouse of Horror" for Game Boy Color allows players to assume the role of Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa or Maggie Simpson as their spirits are drawn deep into the creepy Halloween themed world. Gamers will enjoy six levels of wacky arcade action, which include Simpsons off-beat characters Principal Skinner, Moe, Krusty the Clown and more.

Through several different Springfield locations with character-specific power-ups and objectives, Simpsons fans and gamers alike are sure to enjoy the spirit of Halloween all year round with ‘‘The Simpsons: Night of the Living Treehouse of Horror" for Game Boy Color.

3DO Ships Army Men: Green Rogue for PlayStation2

The 3DO Company announced that it has begun shipping the Army Men: Green Rogue game for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system and PlayStation game console to retail outlets throughout North America and online shopping sites. This exciting new sub-brand in the Army Men series brings a twist in the ongoing war between the Green and Tan nations. The game features third person, forward-scrolling, arcade-style shooter action that will have players doing battle on foot and in amphibious assault vehicles.

The Army Men: Green Rogue game introduces the Green Army’s ultimate soldier: The Omega Soldier. Created within the covert labs of G.A.A.R.D (Green Army Advance Research Division), scientists have combined the genetic samples of Sarge and the Bravo Company Commandos to create this bio-engineered warrior. Skilled in various types of weaponry (including rifle, grenade launcher, bazooka and flame thrower), Omega Soldier has a vast arsenal at his disposal.

Phenomenal special effects bring these weapons to life with realistic

explosions, smoke, shadows, water reflections, and much more. Gamers will use both of the DUALSHOCK2 analog controllers to guide the Omega Soldier, allowing the character to move and attack in all directions.

The Army Men: Green Rogue game takes players through 16 exciting levels and 5 head-to-head boss encounters. In addition, a 2 player cooperative mode offers an additional challenge, as gamers team up to take on the Tans.

Activision Announces Nintendo Game Boy Advance Lineup

Activision, Inc. is poised to deliver maximum thrills and action to the Nintendo Game Boy Advance with the introduction of six new video games based on some of the industry's hottest franchises. Marquee brands that will make their debut on the new hand-held system include Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX, Shaun Palmer's Pro Snowboarder, DOOM and Marvel super-heroes Spider-Man and X-Men.

''Activision is committed to putting the top brands in gaming in the palms of players' hands," states Ron Doornink, President and COO, Activision, Inc. ''Our titles are being developed to take full advantage of the Game Boy Advance and we expect that the quality of these games will rival the level of gameplay found on the current-generation of home consoles."

Activision's Game Boy Advance slate includes:

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 for the Game Boy Advance recreates the thrill of the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater franchise with new level designs, gameplay and technology. Players choose to ride with the skills of Tony Hawk, the most recognized skateboarding pro of all time, or as one of 12 top pro skaters from the same star-studded line-up that is in the PlayStation game console version. Players perform hundreds of tricks with an intuitive and solid control scheme in a variety of realistic, obstacle-filled locations. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 is being developed for Activision by Vicarious Visions, Inc. and is expected to be released this summer.

Spider-Man: Mysterio's Menace

For the first time ever, pocket gamers can live the fantasy of Marvel's web-slinging super-hero with the enhanced, side-scrolling gameplay and powerful graphics of the Nintendo Game Boy Advance. When Mysterio turns Manhattan into one big illusory nightmare, it is up to players to use Spider-Man's ''Spider-Sense" and amazing web-slinging, wall-crawling abilities to stop the evil plan and restore the city to normal. Spider-Man: Mysterio's Menace for the Game Boy Advance is being developed for Activision by Vicarious Visions, Inc. and is scheduled for release this fall.

X-Men: Reign of Apocalypse

Marvel's ever-popular X-Men enter the next dimension when they morph onto the Nintendo Game Boy Advance this fall. Featuring one-to-four-player capabilities, X-Men: Reign of Apocalypse is a side-scrolling brawler featuring over 40 trademark X-Men characters. For the first time, two different modes provide adventurous side-scrolling fun and fighting game action. In Story Mode, players must fight their way through hordes of

enemies, drawing on their mutant powers as they attempt to find a way out of a strange, alternate universe. As players progress through the game, they are confronted with former friends and foes from their own universe -- all bent on stopping the X-Men from returning home. In Versus Mode, players can play head-to-head with up to four players. X-Men: Reign of Apocalypse is being developed for Activision by Digital Eclipse and is expected to be released this fall.

Shaun Palmer’s Pro Snowboarder (working title)

Shaun Palmer’s Pro Snowboarder lets fans build a pro career as snowboarding legend Shaun Palmer or four of the sports’ best riders. Players take their skills to the edge as they shred through four of the world’s best snowboarding locales and discover first hand the secrets of 16 different courses. Players work their way up the ranks of the pro circuit by landing huge tricks in freestyle competitions or snatching the gold in boardercross. Shaun Palmer’s Pro Snowboarder is being developed for Activision by Natsume and is expected to be released this fall.

Mat Hoffman’s Pro BMX

Mat Hoffman’s Pro BMX lets gamers experience the unparalleled thrill of authentic BMX biking. Featuring Mat Hoffman, the most legendary pro BMX rider of all time, and seven other top pros, the game challenges players to perform hundreds of tricks, combinations and signature moves. Mat Hoffman’s Pro BMX features an intuitive solid control scheme that lets players master a multitude of vert, street and dirt track levels. Mat Hoffman’s Pro BMX is being developed for Activision by HotGen and is expected to be released this fall.

DOOM

Based on the most popular action-shooter of all time, id Software’s DOOM for Game Boy Advance features all of the frenetic, adrenaline pumping action and immersive gameplay from the original PC game. True to the original, the game features an advanced 3D graphics engine and an onslaught of horrific demons. DOOM challenges players to face off against attacks from cyber-organic creatures and demons in a timeless battle of skill and firepower.

MLBP Launches Three New Interactive Gaming Simulations

All-Star Baseball 2002, High Heat Major League Baseball 2002 and Triple Play Baseball Deliver the Thrill of Major League Baseball to Home Gaming Systems

Major League Baseball Properties has launched a trio of new PC and Video games that bring the excitement of America’s Pastime to home gaming systems, it was announced Tuesday.

The three titles, All-Star Baseball 2002 by Acclaim Sports, Triple Play Baseball by EA SPORTS, and High Heat Major League Baseball 2002 by the 3DO Company, were all produced under license from Major League Baseball Properties. Each game contains exciting baseball features and unique game play modes that deliver the look and feel of a Major League Baseball game experience.

‘‘The new game titles released by our licensees deliver an exciting and interactive Major League Baseball experience to fans using a wide variety of home gaming platforms," said Howard Smith, Senior Vice President of Licensing for Major League Baseball Properties. ‘‘Each game has its own blend of exciting game play, with great detail and cutting edge graphics, creating an avenue for fans to connect with the game of baseball on a whole new level."

All-Star Baseball 2002, now available for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, features more than 130 player batting stances, 50 pitching deliveries and color commentary from Arizona Diamondbacks Manager Bob Brenly. Triple Play Baseball, now available for PlayStation, PlayStation 2 and PC, features realistic player models, emotional facial expressions, signature pitching and batting styles, along with commentary from Toronto Blue Jays Manager Buck Martinez and Boston Red Sox Commentator Sean McDonough in the PS2 version, and Buck Martinez and Jim Hughson in the PS and PC versions. High Heat Major League Baseball 2002, now available for PlayStation, PlayStation 2, PC and Game Boy Color, features fast-paced true-to-life gameplay, pitchers with accurate repertoires, superior artificial intelligence, interactive crowd excitement and commentary from Florida Marlins announcer Dave O’Brien and Oakland A’s commentator Ray Fosse.

All-Star Baseball 2002 Features

-- All 30 MLB teams and players including official mascots and home, road and alternate uniforms.

-- All 30 MLB stadiums with active dugouts and bullpens, real-time scoreboards & jumbotrons.

-- Cooperstown Hall of Fame Team including Reggie Jackson, Mike Schmidt and Nolan Ryan.

-- Turn back the clock with classic uniforms for each club.

-- Color commentary from Arizona Diamondbacks’ manager Bob Brenly.

-- More than 130 unique player batting stances and 50 pitching deliveries.

-- Future Throw technology for super-smooth catches and throws.

-- General Manager Mode - trade and sign free agents; draft players.

-- Game Modes include Exhibition, Season, Home Run Derby & Batting Practice.

High Heat Major League Baseball 2002 Features

-- Stunningly accurate stadiums result from thousands of scouting photos.

-- Incredibly lifelike star player faces with signature moves and facial details.

-- Intelligent Crowd Excitement (I.C.E.) - animated crowds get louder during exciting moments and even leave the ballpark if the game is a blowout.

-- Intelligent mound-visiting managers and animated base coaches.

-- Two-man booth of Dave O’Brien (Florida Marlins announcer) and Ray Fosse (Color Commentator for the Oakland A’s).

-- ‘‘Sounds of the ballpark" including walk-up music, ballpark clap, organ, cheers, and all new hecklers and vendors.

-- Extremely accurate rosters with real MLB Teams and MLBPA players

High impact TV-like game presentation and rockin’ soundtrack.

Triple Play Baseball Features

-- MLB player facial expressions are keyed into the game’s engine.

Watch your favorite players’ emotions as they strike out or send one over the fence.

-- Realistic player models that have various shapes and sizes for the body and head. Star-player facial textures such as Jason Giambi, Barry Bonds, Derek Jeter and more.

-- The game includes signature pitching and batting styles of players such as El Duque, Nomar Garciaparra, Randy Johnson, Kevin Brown, and others.

-- Scripted animations include umpire arguments, high-fives, and end-of-game celebrations

-- Rewards and codes based on in-game feats including power-ups, special hidden players, bonus teams, and mystery stadiums.

-- All 30 MLB stadiums recreated in precise detail with real-time scoreboards and in-park animations. Real-time lighting in three distinct atmospheres: day, dusk and night games. Enhanced stadium sounds and celebrations from the crowd.

-- 2001 team schedules and rosters.

-- Two Man Booth - color commentary by Buck Martinez with Jim Hughson doing play-by-play.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Dreamcast Rentals Explode Despite Demise Of Console

The online Dreamcast video game rental market grew at a blistering 212% this past year, reports RedOctane (www.redoctane.com), the leading online video game rental service. "Revenues from Dreamcast video game rentals have

been extremely strong despite the recent announcement by Sega that the company will cease production of the Dreamcast video game console," reports Kai Huang, CEO of RedOctane. "With an estimated 4 million Dreamcast consoles on the market and strong customer demand for Dreamcast games, RedOctane is committed to increasing the number of games it carries within the next few months."

"We have experienced an overwhelming demand for new Dreamcast titles," explains Dean Ku, VP of Marketing at RedOctane. "We'll be spending almost 10 times what we're spending now to keep up with the explosive demand during the next few months to make sure we can satisfy all of our customer requests. And this means our customers will be much more likely to find the games they want, and to be able to rent them when they want."

Sega's announcement that it will no longer be producing the Dreamcast game console in late January 2001 came as a surprise to many loyal fans. On the wake of the announcement, Sega said it expects the supply of the Dreamcast consoles and games to remain available through the end of this year. And as an apparent move designed to avoid alienating fans of the Dreamcast, the company announced plans to publish an additional 30 new titles over the next year.

"The enormous surge in the rental market can be attributed to a number of factors," explains Kai Huang, CEO of RedOctane. "The Dreamcast has more great games than any other console and a very large and dedicated following. With Sega's decision to discontinue manufacturing the Dreamcast, many people who previously would have purchased the games are now considering renting as an option. RedOctane is one of the few places to rent Dreamcast video games, so it is not surprising to see this increase in rentals." A Dreamcast rental at RedOctane starts at only $3.95 for a 10-day rental. Customers can also choose to join the RedOctane G3 Unlimited Rental Program.

Subscribers to RedOctane's G3 Unlimited service can rent as many games as they like with the provision that they can only hold up to three games at any one time. Customers can keep the games for as long as they like or return the games as soon as they want. When they have finished Shenmue or mastered every course from Sega GT, they can simply return the game to RedOctane and check out another set of games.

Details of the RedOctane G3 Unlimited Service

Rental Terms: Customers pay just $21.95 per month with no limit on the total number of games they can rent, no due dates, and no late fees. Customers can rotate games as often as they like while holding no more than 3 games at once. Customers may cancel their subscription to the service at any time. Shipping: Free in both directions. Games usually arrive 2-4 days after placement of an order. Availability: G3 Unlimited is only available to U.S. customers with a valid credit card. Games: More than 750 PlayStation, PlayStation 2, and Dreamcast titles. Soon offering games for X-Box and Gamecube.

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Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

U.S. Congress Buried Under E-mail Avalanche

According to a report released Monday, most offices in the U.S. Congress are unequipped to handle the rising tide of e-mail that they receive from their respective constituents.

The study, entitled "E-mail Overload in Congress: Managing a Communications Crisis," delineates the obstacles that have thus far kept congressional offices from implementing more advanced e-mail strategies, and explains how Congress should automate some e-mail services to develop an effective e-mail system.

The Congressional Management Foundation (CMP) and George Washington University conducted the study, which was funded by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts.

CMP director of technical services Cathy Goldschmidt, who also authored the report, told NewsFactor Network that the study was initiated following a 1999 study about the 12 best Web sites on Capitol Hill, also funded by Pew.

Goldschmidt told NewsFactor that congressional offices have been reporting to CMF that handling millions of e-mail messages from the public is "one of the biggest problems they are faced with."

Continued Goldschmidt: "They’re trying to learn what e-mail can do and how to be responsive to constituents," who are increasingly turning to that form of communication to voice their concerns.

According to the study, U.S. House and Senate offices received around 80 million e-mails last year, up from only half that amount in 1998. The report pinpoints the start of the e-mail explosion as December 1998, at the start of the Clinton impeachment hearings.

The study noted similar spikes following other major political upheavals, such as the presidential election recount of November and December 2000 and the nomination of John Ashcroft for attorney general earlier this year.

Topping the list of pressing matters is constituents’ increasing frustration over their representatives’ non-responsiveness to e-mail.

Congressional offices can take as long as three weeks to respond to a constituent’s e-mail, often replying by so-called "snail mail" because staff lacks the knowledge or resources to meet constituents’ e-mail needs.

"As more and more Americans go online every day, e-mail has become an everyday, everybody tool," Yankee Group analyst Rob Lancaster told NewsFactor. "But most [congressional offices] likely don’t have the infrastructure in place to handle e-mail."

Lancaster seconded the report’s assertion that there are many ways to combat this impasse. Among the possibilities he mentioned are message boards where constituents could voice their concerns, and natural-language technology that can figure out what the overriding issue is in any letter

and then send out an appropriate automated response.

"If you're getting 100,000 letters about John Ashcroft, everyday automation can really cut down the workload," Lancaster said. "E-mail management is paralleling customer relations management. [Members of congress] have to start viewing their constituents as customers, and there are a number of different tools available to do this."

"Like congress, constituents are also learning how to navigate the system," said CMP's Goldschmidt. "They're learning that spamming congress is not an effective way to get the attention of a member of congress."

Still, as Yankee Group's Lancaster pointed out, "People want to know they're being heard. And if they're not seeing results, a snowball effect will occur."

U.S. Subcommittee Clears Landmark Anti-Spam Bill

A subcommittee of the U.S. Congress has passed a tough new anti-spam bill that would make it illegal to continue sending unsolicited e-mail after someone asks to be taken off an electronic mailing list.

The House Telecommunication and Internet Subcommittee passed the legislation, sponsored by U.S. Representatives Gene Green (D-Texas) and Heather Wilson (R-New Mexico), on Wednesday.

The bill bars some 718 companies from sending junk e-mail unless that e-mail is identified as an unsolicited commercial advertisement and includes a return e-mail address, so recipients can opt out of receiving future e-mail.

The House panel is a subcommittee of the U.S. House Commerce Committee, which could act on the legislation as early as next week, officials said.

If it is eventually approved, the bill would impose sweeping penalties on senders of unsolicited e-mail, including making it a misdemeanor offense for intentionally using fraudulent return addresses or routing information.

That fraudulent information could include fake domain names or e-mail headers, false date or time stamps, false originating addresses, or any other information that falsely identifies the initiator or router of an e-mail message.

The legislation further allows Internet service providers (ISPs) and consumers to sue to block junk e-mail, with ISPs receiving the power to impose a junk e-mail policy and to sue spammers for US$500 per message if they violate that policy.

Representatives Green and Wilson said they introduced the legislation to give consumers and ISPs greater control over the flow of their electronic mail.

The matter was a personal one for Wilson, who, shortly after her 1998 election, received a spam e-mail that redirected her to a pornographic Web page, spokesman Kevin McDermott told NewsFactor Network.

"She talked to more and more people who were concerned about this," McDermott told NewsFactor. "You have no protection to dictate what does and doesn't get put in your e-mail in box."

The lawmakers said unsolicited e-mail imposes a high economic cost, pointing to a recent study by the European Union that found that unsolicited e-mail costs Internet subscribers worldwide about $9.4 billion in connection costs each year.

The lawmakers' proposal allows aggrieved consumers to appeal to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC), which would then take enforcement action. The FTC would also be authorized to take companies to court to recover damages if they fail to remove consumers from their mailing lists, the lawmakers said.

The bill is the end-product of almost two years of effort by Wilson, who introduced similar legislation last year that cleared the House, only to stall in the Senate.

"You can block telemarketers from calling you at dinnertime and you can stop junk e-mail and junk faxes," McDermott told NewsFactor. "This is just an extension of an already proven consumer protection law that's being extended to the new technology of e-mail."

Approval of the Green-Wilson bill comes just six days after a Virginia lawmaker introduced legislation that would have imposed similarly harsh penalties on spammers.

That legislation, sponsored by Representative Bill Goodlatte (R-Virginia), would have made it a criminal offense to fraudulently use another person's e-mail address to send unsolicited e-mail.

Violators could face penalties of up to $15,000 per violation or $10 per e-mail, whichever is greater, the lawmaker said. Violators would also be responsible for repayment of monetary losses suffered by their victims.

Like Wilson and Green, Goodlatte said unsolicited e-mail imposes a high cost on smaller ISPs. Goodlatte pointed to a recent study by Jupiter Research that the average consumer received just 40 pieces of spam in 1999. That figure is expected to jump to 1,600 pieces by 2005, he said.

"Unsolicited e-mail is the junk mail of the information age," Goodlatte told NewsFactor. "This legislation gives law enforcement the tools they need to take unsolicited e-mail out of your inbox."

Spam Wars: Can They Be Won?

Two San Diego men could be the first to face felony criminal charges related to spam in California after they allegedly crashed a company's computer system by rerouting tens of thousands of unsolicited e-mails through its servers.

Michael Persaud and Frank Kriticos, both of the San Diego area, are charged with three counts of disrupting computer services, doing so to cause injury and illegally using someone else's domain name. They could face up to four years and four months in jail if convicted.

Although many spamming cases are brought into civil courts, Persaud and Kriticos are believed to be the first to face criminal penalties in California in connection with sending unsolicited e-mail.

"Since law enforcement hasn't been responding to this type of crime, spammers have been operating with impunity," said San Diego County Deputy District Attorney Michael Groch, who's prosecuting the case, adding that he hasn't come across any other people facing criminal charges related to spam in the state.

The phenomenon of spam has become one of the Internet's biggest blemishes. Consumer groups, privacy advocates and Internet service providers have vocally rallied against spammers, saying the e-mail pitches overload people's in-boxes and companies' ISP networks.

Internet companies that offer e-mail have spent considerable resources to fight the problem. Giants such as AOL Time Warner's America Online have taken suspected spammers to court on civil charges, and many states have enacted legislation to fight the proliferation of spam. But some early legal tests have gone against those measures.

Courts have so far struck down two attempts by states to rein in spammers, citing inconsistencies with federal laws regulating interstate commerce. Judges in California and Washington state have ruled that some of their respective attempts at anti-spam legislation were unconstitutional.

Groch said that in this latest case, San Diego's Computer Technology Crime High-Tech Response Team was able to track the spammers because they used someone else's computers.

Under the state's anti-spamming law, it is legal to transmit spam in California if the sender puts "ADV:" in the subject line and gives the recipient a real option of unsubscribing. Failing to do so constitutes a misdemeanor. However, for the most part, those laws have not been enforced.

Persaud and Kriticos are facing felony charges for allegedly using computers owned by Veritools, a Palo Alto-based company that creates debugging software, to carry out their task. Law enforcement was first notified of the spamming incident in December, when Veritools' system crashed after tens of thousands of e-mails were rerouted through its servers.

According to prosecutors, the pair was hired by a refinancing company to find people who would be interested in its services. The e-mails, which offered refinancing services, appeared to come from a Veritools affiliate, and return messages from angry spam recipients also put a strain on the company's computer system, according to prosecutors.

The San Diego County District Attorney's office learned of the identities of Persaud and Kriticos after issuing several search warrants to the San Diego Web hosting company that appeared to be the source of the spam. The pair was arrested in February. They appeared in court earlier this week, but asked for a later date for their arraignment because they needed time to secure attorneys. The hearing has been continued until April.

Groch said the pair was "willfully ignorant" of the laws, and he hoped that a prosecution in the case would deter others from committing similar crimes.

If they are found guilty, it would be at least the second criminal conviction for a spammer in the United States. In December, an Orange County, Calif., man pleaded guilty in New York to sending millions of porn and get-rich-quick spam.

Groch said his task force, one of five in California, would only go after people who break spamming or computer security laws, not every sender of junk e-mail. "We're definitely not the spam police, so we don't want everyone who gets spam to forward it to us for prosecution," he said.

Meanwhile, several federal lawmakers are pushing new legislation that would outlaw certain junk e-mail practices. Just this week, Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., introduced the Anti-Spamming Act of 2001, which would make it illegal to forge items such as the time stamp or originating e-mail address of a spam message. Rep. Heather Wilson, R-N.M., introduced a bill containing similar anti-spam provisions last month. Many spammers try to disguise their identities so spam recipients cannot complain or remove themselves from a list.

U.S. In Quandary Over Cybercrime Issues

The U.S. Congress is finding itself in a quandary over the Internet, as rates of cybercrime are rising quickly and privacy advocates are stepping up pressure to keep both private and government snoops at bay.

A U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) survey last week showed online theft and fraud cost U.S. businesses more than US$244 million last year. More recent projections show losses will be closer to $1 billion in 2001.

At the same time, privacy advocates say the price is a small one to pay if it keeps government trackers out of their lives.

Issues of cybercrime and security are heading for what is expected to be a heated debate sometime during this congressional year, as numerous bills dealing with each side of the question have been introduced.

Speaking at a panel discussion on the subject, Marc Rotenberg, executive director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC), said the best thing government can do is to help improve security and privacy technology.

Later, Rotenberg told NewsFactor Network that the government "cannot be given everything it needs in fighting crime, and ignoring the needs to keep government out of the life of law-abiding citizens."

Rotenberg said the Web is an unstable playground, with numerous private companies already cataloging and reporting on user habits. The idea, he said, of the government being able to intrude is even more offensive.

In the same panel discussion, Orin Kerr, a trial attorney in the U.S. Department of Justice's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section, said cybercriminals currently have the upper hand over government efforts.

"It's still early in the game," Kerr said, "but I'd strongly advise everyone to safeguard their own systems until we can get ahead of the curve."

The debate followed a report last week that the FBI is investigating a computer crime wave in which Russian and Ukrainian hacker groups, supported by the mob, broke into about 40 Western companies' computer systems, threatening to post stolen credit card numbers and other data if the companies did not pay large sums of money.

The alert shows that online crime is becoming much more serious than most people think, said Bill Marlow, chief strategy officer for Global Integrity, a security firm based in Reston, Virginia.

Marlow said that besides extortionists being investigated by the FBI, organized crime rings are selling trade secrets to foreign competitors of American businesses.

He said quantifying the financial losses of hacking is not easy, because it is difficult to assign a dollar value to intellectual property such as business plans or marketing strategies.

"Sometimes these kinds of thefts turn out to be much more expensive than the ones we read about in the press," Marlow said.

Meanwhile, the FBI went out of its way last week to announce that an alarming new tool will soon be available for cyber-criminals.

The FBI said the new cyber-weapon, called the "Stick," disarms traditional security systems by overloading them with information, opening access to information-hungry thieves.

Most industry observers, however, are calling the Stick flawed and are not giving it much of a chance for success. In addition, a growing number of online security companies either have software to defend against it or are close to developing it.

Wall Street Calls on Amazon To Open Books

An influential group of security analysts has asked Amazon to provide detailed financial information to allay concerns that the Internet behemoth is teetering on the brink of bankruptcy.

The letter, sent Thursday, is the second sent to Amazon this month by the New York Society of Security Analysts' Committee for Corporate Governance. The group wants Amazon to provide more specific information backing up the company's statements that it has enough money to survive the year.

"The information being provided is not sufficient to reconcile estimates and pro-forma numbers with reality-based facts," said investment banker and committee co-chairman Gary Lutin.

The second letter was necessary, according to the society, because Amazon failed to respond to the first letter and because an Amazon spokesperson publicly stated that Jeff Bezos, Amazon chief executive officer, did not have time to deal with the letter.

"Amazon's management has publicly stated that they have neglected to give you my March 8, 2001 letter, which asks for board responses to issues presented by the Amazon Forum being conducted by the New York Society of

Security Analysts' Committee for Corporate Governance," the society's newest letter to Seattle, Washington-based Amazon said.

The committee had asked Amazon to cooperate in a November workshop to explain its cash numbers. The company declined to be available via phone but did agree to answer written questions.

Unfortunately, according to Lutin, the company's written responses "didn't provide any additional information" or tell the analysts where additional information could be found.

"The only thing they could identify was wrong was an assumption, that was supported by a couple of analysts, that creditors would not grant credit on available cash," Lutin told the E-Commerce Times. "No facts or examples were provided to support the assumption that trade creditors would base their decision on the cash balance of prior periods and abandon their conservative analysis based on working capital."

Once the darling of Wall Street and an icon for the brave new world of e-commerce, Amazon has increasingly fallen out of favor as critics question whether its business model can become profitable.

The stock has become so volatile that even Bezos has reportedly warned investors to be wary of purchasing it.

"We are not a stock you can sleep well with at night," Bezos reportedly said in an appearance on "Money Programme," a BBC show.

The company has also been involved in a very public battle with Lehman Brothers vice president of convertibles strategy Ravi Suria, over a report in which Suria said Amazon did not have enough money to survive 2001. The report drew a sharp retort from Amazon.

"You can't take this guy seriously," Amazon spokesman Bill Curry told the E- Commerce Times at the time of the report. "His report is chock full of errors."

Suria questioned the validity of Amazon's reported US$1.1 billion cash on hand. He placed the company's liquidity at $386 million and predicted that without a cash infusion, the company would "dip into negative territory."

Curry countered that Amazon is highly liquid, and that Suria pulls "so many of his numbers out of thin air."

The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is reportedly investigating Bezos for insider trading because he sold about 1 percent of his personal stock holdings after receiving an advance copy of Suria's report, but before the report became public.

Curry was quoted as saying that the timing of Bezos' stock sale had more to do with the release of the company's quarterly earnings report because trades were prohibited until three days after earnings results were announced.

Florida Sues CompuServe Over Rebates

The state attorney general's office filed suit Wednesday against CompuServe,

one of the nation’s largest Internet service providers, accusing it of not delivering promised rebates.

The state is seeking more than $1 million from the company in the suit in Circuit Court, saying more than 100 customers did not receive a promised rebate from the company or it came months late.

The Ohio-based company, which is owned by AOL Time Warner Inc. and has more than 2 million customers worldwide, denies the allegations.

Since the summer of 1999, CompuServe has promised customers a $400 rebate if they sign up for three years of Internet service at $21.95 a month.

The rebates are supposed to take eight to 12 weeks to process, but some customers never received their money while others didn’t receive a check for several months, the suit says.

Assistant Attorney General Stephen LeClair, who filed the suit in Broward County Circuit Court, said that when customers complained, they were told their rebate application had been rejected because of missing information, such as an e-mail address.

‘‘But the company made no effort to contact consumers to correct their applications," LeClair said. The missing information also didn’t prevent the company from billing customers, he said.

The suit also charges that the company signed up customers for costly services without their permission and refused to correct billing mistakes after being notified.

LeClair could not immediately release the names of any customers who filed complaints. Most live in Florida, he said, but some live elsewhere.

CompuServe spokeswoman Anne Bentley said the company ‘‘has processed hundreds of thousands of rebates and is working diligently to process as fast as possible others we have received."

She denied that the company failed to contact customers who filed incomplete applications, saying they were sent postcards asking them to submit the missing information.

She said the company also works hard to correct any billing mistakes and never signs up customers for services they haven’t ordered.

Record Labels to File Complaint Next Week on Napster

A music industry trade group on Thursday said it will file a complaint in court next week saying Napster has failed to comply with an injunction requiring it to strip copyrighted songs from its directory.

‘‘It’s clear that Napster is not complying with the court’s order to remove copyrighted material on its site. We’re going to file a non-compliance report to the court next week," said Jano Cabrera, a spokesman for the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

‘‘We will spell out in detail our concerns in our filing," he said.

Under an injunction issued by U.S. District Court Judge Marilyn Hall Patel on March 5, Napster must block copyrighted songs that have been identified by the record companies, which first filed the landmark copyright infringement suit against the wildly popular service in December 1999.

The world's biggest record labels -- including Vivendi Universal's Universal Music, Sony Music, Warner Music, EMI Group Plc and Bertelsmann AG's BMG have collectively sent the company lists of more than half a million songs, resulting in severely curtailing the amount of music available on the service.

According to research firm Webnoize, Napster users were downloading 50 percent fewer files as the company ramped up its screening technology last week.

Napster's service sparked a revolution in the music world by enabling users to swap songs for free by trading MP3 files, a compression format that turns music on compact discs into small digital files. It has attracted over 60 million users.

While downloading on the service is down, music industry officials said Napster's efforts have fallen short because a lot of songs that should be blocked are still readily available. Furthermore, the company has failed to prevent users from sidestepping its screening mechanism by merely changing the spelling of file names.

While no date has been set for the RIAA's filing, sources expect it will be entered early next week.

Many observers had expected disputes to arise following the issuance of the injunction.

Napster had no immediate comment on the RIAA's plans, but has already filed two compliance reports with the court, which said the labels themselves have not been in compliance with the injunction.

Napster Chief Executive Hank Barry has said that many of the songs submitted were missing file names, as required by the court order.

''When all of the information was submitted properly, then Napster has removed the files from its service," a spokesman for Napster said on Thursday.

In its filing, Napster said that record labels' lack of compliance has placed a serious and inappropriate economic and physical burden on Napster.

Napster has tried to block misspellings manually, and has also recently announced an alliance with Gracenote, which has a database with millions of song name variations.

However, Napster users have grown increasingly adept at developing ways to evade these filters.

While Napster has tried to block certain techniques, such as using pig Latin to change artists' names, other methods have managed to evade the blocking.

Napster is hoping to survive until July, when it plans to launch a paid subscription service with entertainment giant Bertelsmann AG.

Libraries Due to Take on New Internet Law

A coalition of public libraries, library patrons and Web site operators will challenge in court on Tuesday a U.S. law designed to protect children from exposure to Internet pornography in public libraries and schools.

Officials said a total of three-dozen plaintiffs led by the American Library Association and the American Civil Liberties Union will file two separate constitutional challenges to the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) in U.S. court in Philadelphia.

CIPA, which was passed by Congress and signed into law by former President Clinton in December, requires public libraries and schools to install pornography-blocking software on computers or risk losing hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds and assistance.

The new law represents the latest attempt by the Republican-controlled U.S. Congress to control online smut, and the first not to rely on criminal penalties.

The 1996 Communications Decency Act was thrown out by the U.S. Supreme Court as an infringement of free speech four years ago, while the 1998 Child Online Protection Act remains sidelined by a court injunction. Both made it a crime for Web site operators to expose children to online pornography.

‘‘CIPA is a federal funding statute, not a criminal statute," noted Chris Hansen, a senior ACLU staff attorney.

‘‘But what's also different about CIPA is that by targeting libraries and schools, it has a disproportionate effect on people who aren't rich. People who aren't rich don't have Internet access at home and so they need to use the library."

Opponents of law are expected to ask a federal judge to prevent it from coming into force on April 20, claiming the measure restricts lawful access to information guaranteed by the constitution.

‘‘Congress has delegated decision-making to the makers of Internet filtering software," charged Nancy Kranich, president of the American Library Association, which represents 61,000 U.S. public, academic, special and school libraries.

‘‘These companies will not say what sites they block. And they have been known to block the Democratic Party but not the Republican Party, and groups like Handgun Control but not the National Rifle Association," she added.

CIPA supporters led by Arizona Republican Sen. John McCain and Republican U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook of Oklahoma say they are well-prepared for a new constitutional battle over Internet censorship.

In a statement released on Monday, McCain said the law does not require any specific filtering technology, nor does it dictate what material should be filtered out.

‘‘It simply ensures that schools and libraries across the country have the

material they need to protect children from harmful material on the Internet," he said.

In recent years, U.S. public and school libraries have faced intense scrutiny from conservative groups who object to the sexual and violent content of books and other materials that could fall into the hands of children.

Philadelphia has become the site for constitutional battles over Internet censorship because it was here in the 18th century that the U.S. founding fathers adopted the constitution and its first amendment right to free speech.

Web Site Ads, Holding Sway, Start to Blare

Many sites are allowing advertisers to occupy a much larger portion of their pages, as well as create ads that do whatever it takes to attract attention.

Until recently, advertising on the Internet stayed in one place and didn’t speak until spoken to, or at least clicked on.

Now, as even the biggest Internet sites struggle with a sharp decline in ad revenue, sites are letting their remaining advertisers occupy a much larger portion of their pages, as well as create ads that move, make noise and otherwise do whatever it takes to attract attention.

Big advertisers, especially the traditional companies that spend billions burnishing their images on television, have long complained that the oblong spaces they have been able to buy on Internet sites are too small to tell a persuasive story. But most sites were afraid that bigger and bolder advertisements would irritate their users. Now that sites have plenty of users and fewer advertisers, their priorities are shifting quickly.

For example, a cork pops out of a Champagne bottle in an advertisement recently placed atop the movie page of the iWon.com portal. It bounds behind the listings and over the reviews and ultimately crashes into an image of a cremation urn in another ad on the side of the page.

If that’s not enough to catch a user’s attention, the loud crashing sound surely is. (Those who click on either ad are whisked to a site selling videotapes of "Meet the Parents," a movie in which a cork and an urn have an unfortunate coming together.)

"Too many people involved with the Internet have been too shy about advertising," said Scott Kurnit, chief Internet officer of Primedia, the publishing company that bought About .com, the big Web portal he founded. "The ads are too small and not intrusive enough."

So About.com is redesigning its site to permit larger advertisements and ones that incorporate 5- to 15- second video clips. As with television, where ads eat up eight minutes every half-hour to pay for what the viewer sees, Mr. Kurnit says Web users will need to accept these new types of advertising.

"If I’m giving you something of value at no cost, I will charge you with

your time, not your money," he said.

Other intrusive ads are popping up all around the Web.

A bleating sound accompanies a large window with a picture of a sheep jumping over a Taco Bell sign that appeared on some music sites. (The message: it's open late.) And the entire background of stock quote pages on CBS MarketWatch is now covered with Budweiser logos.

Some articles on News.com, the Cnet Networks' technology news site, wrap around big rectangular advertisements, like one for NexTel that flashes with interactive demonstrations of a new telephone. This new type of ad was recently approved as an industry standard and will be appearing on growing numbers of sites in the months ahead, including The New York Times on the Web. (The Times site has also permitted limited use of pop-up ad windows in recent months.)

In fact, some of these new formats may well offer some benefit for users as well as advertisers. While they may distract a user reading an article, larger ads can allow a reader to get more information about a product without clicking to go all the way to the advertiser's own Web site. And some of the big pop-up ads contain games or humorous animations that may be more entertaining than the standard long skinny "banner" ads.

But there is no getting around that the very tactics that are effective in diverting people's attention will inevitably annoy some of them. A sudden burst of sound from an otherwise demure Web site is not only a shock, but also a potential embarrassment to someone sneaking in a little personal surfing time while ostensibly working in an office cubicle. And all the graphics and other information required for these new ads can make the opening of Web pages infuriatingly slow.

"People are on the Internet because it's more convenient and they want to save time," said Myer Berlow, president of interactive marketing at the America Online unit of AOL Time Warner. "Making them spend more time doing what they want is not going to work."

Of course, AOL is famous for ads that pop up over the start screen of its flagship service. And it has tried many of the new ad types on one or another corner of its far-flung empire. But Mr. Berlow argues that intrusive advertising will always be a small piece of the total.

"Interactivity requires a different kind of marketing than we are used to with television," he said. "You don't jump in front of someone and interrupt their train of thought. You provide the tools for them to find what they are looking for."

Others argue that it is fine for AOL - the biggest, richest and most ad-covered Internet service - to talk of serving users. Thousands of other Internet sites that serve hundreds of millions of users need new sources of revenue to stay in business, and big loud ads may just be their last best hope.

"Companies have been so user- centric that they forgot to be advertiser- and sponsor-centric," said Bill Daugherty, the co-chief executive of iWon. "You can build the best user experience in the world, but if it doesn't work for advertisers that experience is going away."

IWon has found a number of ways to entice users to click on ads. Traditional banners now induce only about half a percent of users to

click. Larger ads have "click rates" closer to 2 percent. If the ad includes the user's name - a possibility on sites that encourage registration - the response is 3 percent. If animated elements fly out of the ad and around the page, as the cork does in the ad for "Meet the Parents," the click rate is 7 percent. And for ads that pop up in separate windows with sound and motion, like a recent ad for Taster's Choice coffee, the response can top 10 percent.

For all the innovation and experimentation over the last few years, sites were not pressed to find ways to make online advertising more effective. The start-up companies, flush with venture capital and proceeds from public offerings, spread their wealth around, advertising on each other's sites. Even relatively small banner ads produced some benefit because the advertisers were simply trying to lure people to their sites.

Traditional advertisers are more disciplined and also have a harder task: persuading consumers to grab their products off the shelf rather than their competitors' goods. The marketers were worried because many of their best customers were surfing more and watching less television, but the Web appeared to have none of the persuasive power of TV.

Two years ago Procter & Gamble, promised to divert an increasing amount of its nearly $4 billion ad budget to the Internet, but it reserved more than half that money for formats bigger than banner ads. Often a separate window with a larger ad would pop up over the page the user was trying to read.

The results were as expected.

"In general when it comes to Internet ads we've found that bigger is better," said Vivienne Bechtold, Procter's head of Web advertising. Even better, P.& G. found, were pop- up windows with animation or interactive elements.

Until recently, however, many of the most popular sites were shy about accepting the sort of ad that Procter and others most wanted to buy. That began to change last fall, not coincidentally as Internet companies started to fail. Walt Disney created a large advertising unit, shaped like a television screen, at the top of its most visited Web pages on ESPN.com, ABCNews.com and the Go.com portal, which is now defunct. Cnet and iWon also created big TV- like ads.

Increasingly, sites are also mimicking America Online and permitting ads that pop up in new windows over their pages. Excite@Home, an Internet portal, has found that three to five times as many people click on these, compared with traditional banners. More people complain, too.

"We carefully monitor the 'crank rate,' " its measure of the number of user complaints, said Susan Bratton, the senior vice president for ad sales at Excite@Home. "If it gets too high we worry."

The biggest source of complaints, she said, is the same advertisement popping up too often. So now the site limits the frequency of such ads.

General Motors is testing an alternative format that superimposes animated images right over Web pages. In one incarnation, an image of a Chevy Tahoe drives across the sports screen on iWon.com, engine noise revving. If a user clicks on it, the image stays and more information is offered. Otherwise it disappears in a few seconds.

"People don’t like pop-up windows because they are intrusive," said Joyce Fierens, General Motors’ director of interactive marketing. "We think this could be better, because if you don’t like it you don’t have to do anything to get rid of it."

That is all nifty when everything works as it is supposed to, but many of these new ads often make surfing far slower and sometimes risk causing the user’s computer to crash.

"If it takes too long for a site to load, users get impatient and they go somewhere else," said Brian McAndrews, the chief executive of Avenue A, a firm that measures ad effectiveness.

Apple’s OS X Biggest Change for Macintosh Since ’84

Spotlights will sweep the sky of this San Jose suburb at midnight on Friday as Apple Computer Inc. reveals the OS X operating system, which it calls the biggest change to the Macintosh computer in 17 years.

‘‘At the stroke of midnight, Mac OS X goes on sale," trumpeted Elite Computer, a dealer across the street from Apple headquarters, in an invitation to a ‘‘must attend" event kicking off the weekend launch of OS X, pronounced ‘‘O.S. Ten."

Whether such hysteria will die out or build like the flurry that greeted the Mac’s friendly graphical interface in 1984 -- when an Orwellian commercial showed a woman throwing a hammer at a Big Brother screen -- is an open question.

The company, which has always been an underdog to computers running Microsoft’s Windows applications, has much riding on the completely redesigned operating system and is still shaking out bugs and tweaking it.

Founded in a bedroom in Silicon Valley in 1976, Apple had a money-losing quarter and some product missteps at the end of last year. The company had recently returned to profitability under co-founder Steve Jobs, who came back to the company as chief executive officer three-and-a-half years ago.

Typically, Jobs says Apple has done good.

‘‘Doing something that is both at the same time easier and more powerful is really, really hard. And that’s what I think our team has accomplished. That is what has taken us the labor of months and years," he said at a prelaunch event.

‘‘We want to build a Mac OS for the next 15 years."

Apple, with about 4 percent of the personal computer market, has a chance to keep pace with market growth with the new system, Gartner analyst Martin Reynolds said.

‘‘This is a very necessary step for Apple," agreed his colleague at Gartner, Chris Le Tocq.

The platform is rock solid, using ‘‘protected memory" to contain program disasters that otherwise could ripple out and freeze a computer, Apple said. Another improvement keeps videos and other software running

simultaneously, a holy grail that, if really achieved, meets an old industry pledge.

It firmly faces the Internet, with features and services that complement the company’s philosophy that the personal computer will survive as the hub of a digital universe.

The improvement is apparent -- immediately, when one opens an OS X-loaded Titanium notebook, for instance, which springs into action from sleep, playing a video before the lid is up.

It then searches out the best network connection, wireless or hard-wired, office or home, and away you go. ‘‘This is instant on. This is it. It really works," crowed designer Avie Tivanian in a demonstration.

There are also screen changes, and Apple offers during installation to sign up users for free email and Internet storage, evidence of its focus on the Internet.

Many of the nifty add-ons are thanks to Apple’s decision to modify the venerable, industrial standard UNIX operating system for home use. UNIX, in one form or another, runs most of the Internet and is the most corporate operating system.

OS X also runs Java, a programming language widely used on the Internet, which will help to bring in programs, and produces files in the popular PDF web-publishing format.

‘‘Unsolicited developers are coming to the Mac platform in droves," said Clent Richardson, Apple’s vice president for world wide developer relations.

Microsoft will have an OS X version of its Office suite by fall, although the OS X also supports programs designed for earlier versions.

However, Apple is getting off to a lame start. Though its "Rip. Mix. Burn." advertising campaign invites users to make their own digital music play lists and write them onto compact discs, Apple’s OS X will not support CD writing until a patch appears around the end of April and DVD movies will not play before a fix due after that.

Analysts have also asked why Apple is waiting until summer to preload OS X on new machines, forcing buyers in the interim to purchase both a new machine and the $129 operating system upgrade -- or to wait to buy, costing Apple sales.

Jobs shrugged off the issue of sales and when asked about the economy pointed at Apple’s $4 billion stockpile of cash.

That cash, nearly $12 per share, is worth more than half Apple’s current stock price, about $20.

‘‘Apple is very strong right now. And it is wonderful, because we can afford these new initiatives without worrying about the short-term effects of the economy."

Microsoft’s HailStorm Unleashed

Microsoft on Monday launched a Hailstorm aimed at upstaging rival America Online.

The software giant unveiled a set of software building blocks, grouped under the code name Hailstorm, for its .Net software-as-a-service strategy. Along with Hailstorm, Microsoft marshaled out new versions of its Web-based Hotmail e-mail service, MSN instant messenger, and Passport authentication service.

The Redmond, Wash.-based software company is positioning Hailstorm as way of enticing developers to create XML (Extensible Markup Language)-based Web services deliverable to a variety of PC and non-PC devices such as handhelds and Web appliances.

With Hailstorm, Microsoft is attempting to position instant messaging as a development application, rather than a limited-purpose consumer application. The idea is to use instant messaging as the behind-the-scenes vehicle for a range of Web services such as instant stock quotes, calendar functions, and Web commerce services.

By using instant messaging as a core development application, Hailstorm pits Microsoft against AOL--the leader in instant messaging technology.

Microsoft on Monday also disclosed five development partners for its .Net plan including eBay, which announced its partnership last week. Ebay and Microsoft entered into a strategic technology exchange that includes turning the eBay API (application programming interface) into a .Net service.

In a Monday research note Merrill Lynch analyst Henry Blodget said Hailstorm is important to Microsoft for two reasons.

"First, it should increase the size and loyalty of Microsoft’s consumer user base, which should ultimately create opportunities for Microsoft to charge users a monthly fee," he said.

"Second, and more importantly, Hailstorm should make the .Net platform more attractive to third party developers," Blodget said. "These developers will be able to leverage both the Hailstorm code and user base when building their own web services--similar to how they leverage the Windows OS when building PC applications."

Part of Microsoft’s success with Windows has been wooing developers to create applications for the operating system, thereby increasing Windows’ appeal. In transitioning to a Web-based services strategy, Microsoft must continue to attract developers for the same reasons.

"Attracting developers to the .Net platform is one of Microsoft’s key strategic imperatives for the next several years," Blodget said. "Doing so will help drive sales of nearly all core Microsoft products, which will be tied to .Net."

But Microsoft faces multiple challenges as it seeks to shift sales away from PC-bound software applications to Web-based software and services. One trouble spot may be battling competitors, including IBM, Sun Microsystems and Hewlett-Packard, that are also hoping to attract developers.

Microsoft envisions two types of .Net services: broad horizontal

building-block services such as Hailstorm and application-specific services. But rather than solely relying on Microsoft technology to become the standard for these services, the company is using established Web development languages such as XML, SOAP (Simple Object Access Protocol) and UDDI (Universal Description Discovery and Integration).

IBM also is pushing XML, the emerging choice du jour for creating Web pages, and also UDDI, a sort of Web services Yellow Pages for developers. IBM last week used XML and UDDI to beef up its WebSphere Application Server and has been aggressively using the tools to woo developers to its middleware software.

With HailStorm, Think Fee, Not Free

Is the Internet free lunch over?

If Microsoft has its way, that could very well be the case, analysts say.

The Redmond, Wash.-based software company on Monday unveiled HailStorm, one of the cornerstones of its software-as-a-service initiative known as .Net.

HailStorm is a group of services, using Microsoft’s Passport authentication technology, meant to provide secure access to e-mail, address lists and other personal data from virtually anywhere via PCs, cell phones and PDAs (personal digital assistants). The catch? Users of the services will be required to pay a fee to them. Analysts said that if the HailStorm model is widely adopted--and if people will pay a premium for security--the days of ad-subsidized Internet services, such as free e-mail and messaging, may be over.

"HailStorm is absolutely the test of can you make money on the Web," said Gartner analyst Chris LeTocq. "But to get there, you have to offer people something they are willing to pay for. That will be the test for Microsoft."

Microsoft executives are confident that the time is right for HailStorm. "There’s been a lot of stuff (on the Internet) in the last couple of years that was free and interesting, but people weren’t actually willing to pay for it," said Charles Fitzgerald, director of business development in Microsoft’s platform strategy group. "We want to pursue a model that lets us deliver a lot more value in an economic fashion so that we all can get paid every two weeks like we’re used to."

Certainly the current advertising-driven model has sent many Internet-based companies to an early grave. More than 320 dot-coms have shut their doors since January 2000, half in the last three months and 52 in February alone, according to Webmergers.com.

"The ad-based model is basically a failure," said Prudential Securities analyst James Lucier. "The reason we’ve had so much content provided on an advertising model is that was the only model there was."

Microsoft is convinced that the company and its partners can charge for services and content if they deliver value to consumers and businesses. During its HailStorm launch event Monday, Microsoft disclosed five partners using the services. American Express, for one, plans to use

Passport to authenticate Internet purchases made with its Blue card. At the same time, the company will utilize MSN Messenger, which also relies on Passport authentication, to alert customers when their bills are due. The instant messenger alerts, which include possible fraudulent-use warnings, would be dispatched to PC, pager or cell phone.

LeTocq described the concept that Microsoft uses as that of personal context services, which is Gartner's name for the collective management of an individual's personal information. Using a Passport-authenticated service, a business traveler would be able to grab disparate data from both PC and cell phone to send instant messages to the last 100 people called.

"That's really where the unique value plays," he added. "What Microsoft has put in place is an application architecture which has the capability to provide that value. That's what people would be willing to pay for."

Strangely, Microsoft's strategy seems the antithesis of the company's focus for 25 years. Perhaps more than any company, Microsoft is viewed as the catalyst that broke people away from the server-in-the-sky mainframe-era model and brought information and power to the desktop. Microsoft's HailStorm model, in contrast, would take content, services and even software away from the PC.

Fitzgerald dismissed the contention that Microsoft has shifted focus. "Our roots are around personal empowerment and giving people control over their environment," he said. With information going back to the server because of the Internet's dominance, "HailStorm is about personal-empowerment tenets--the idea you're in control of your stuff not just on a single PC but all the different technologies in your life."

"There's PCs, phones, PDAs and all kinds of access devices, so getting information to them could be a good value proposition," said Technology Business Research analyst Lindy Lesperance. "But it all depends on what the pricing is going to be."

Microsoft has yet to say what it will charge for HailStorm services when it launches them in force next year. But there is great potential for revenue, Merrill Lynch analyst Henry Blodget said in a research report issued Tuesday.

"Today, there are roughly 230 million unique monthly users of MSN," Blodget wrote. "However, Microsoft has a billing relationship with only a tiny fraction of these users--specifically, the 4.5 million subscribers to its MSN Internet access service." If Microsoft can establish a billing relationship with these customers, the company could also pitch additional HailStorm services to them, he added.

Still, convincing people to pay for services, such as MSN, after getting them for free could be a challenge, even for Microsoft, say analysts.

Microsoft could capitalize on a unique advantage: a huge installed base of Windows users. New operating system and application software from Microsoft will be designed to work with HailStorm. That, however, raises the antitrust specter. Microsoft's integration of Internet Explorer into Windows 95 and Windows 98, in part, led to the company's antitrust case, which currently is being appealed.

University of Baltimore School of Law professor Bob Lande said HailStorm probably poses no antitrust problem for Microsoft. "Microsoft got in

trouble the first time not because it integrated something into its operating system but because it prevented other people from competing. I haven't seen Microsoft throwing things in other people's paths on HailStorm--plus, they want to charge for it. This is completely different than before."

How successful Microsoft might eventually be with HailStorm is uncertain, but LeTocq sees "the potential for transforming how people pay" for Internet content and services.

Lucier sees HailStorm possibly "expanding the range of alternatives available to entrepreneurs. Will this replace free content? Possibly not, but free content hasn't really been able to support itself."

But Microsoft's real asset could be offering the carrot of privacy. Because the company plans to collect subscriber fees rather than rely on advertising, the model is clean and free from conflict, Fitzgerald said.

Lesperance said this could make all the difference for Microsoft. "I think people are willing to pay for their privacy," she said. "I think Microsoft could do well to offer people increased privacy over the Web."

LeTocq agreed, but added a cautionary note. "Will people really trust Microsoft to safeguard their personal data? I can tell you there are countries in Europe that will not look favorably on Passport authentication."

For now, Microsoft is holding its course, emphasizing what HailStorm promises in terms of information access and privacy protection. Ultimately, HailStorm's success could hinge on people asking one simple question, Fitzgerald said.

"How much would you pay to get all your stuff to work together and know that nobody has access to your personal information?"

Intel Rolls Out Crusoe-Crusher Chip

Intel Corp. on Monday unveiled its fastest laptop computer processor yet, a mobile Pentium III that company officials said runs at 1 Gigahertz, or one billion computations per second.

Personal computer makers are expected to announce more than 20 systems that will incorporate the chip. Among them are Compaq, Dell, Hewlett-Packard, Gateway, Sony, IBM and others. The new chip tops Intel's previous mobile Pentium processor, which ran at 850 megahertz.

Notebooks containing the new chip are expected to sell for between US$2,500 and $3,000 with one cheaper model at less than $2,000, according to Intel officials.

The chip is designed to be used in full-sized and ultra-thin laptops and will improve advanced applications. It also contains new technology that extends battery life -- a crucial factor in mobile chip technology, analysts say.

"[Intel] has raised the clock speed, and I think that's necessary for them to be perceived as leading the charge in mobile computing," Forrester

director of research Carl Howe told NewsFactor Network.

"That has traditionally been Intel's marketing message. The funny thing about mobile is that clock speed is only one part of the equation -- power consumption is the other part."

Intel's chief rival in the mobile market, Transmeta, currently produces the leading power-saving mobile chip, called Crusoe.

"[Intel] doesn't have the high ground there yet," Howe said. "Transmeta defined the category of low-power mobile, and I think Intel's going to have to work hard to convince people they're as good."

Though Transmeta's power-saving Crusoe chip is not big in the United States, many notebooks using it are expected to arrive in the next few months, including one that has both a Windows and Linux operating system.

Although Sony is currently the only maker with a Transmeta notebook in the U.S., Casio and NEC are expected to introduce Crusoe-powered notebooks in the near future.

"The challenge is getting rid of more of the chips on the motherboard, because every chip you've got consumes power," Howe said. "Batteries don't get better that fast, so the only way you're going to get battery lives that are much longer is through reduced power consumption."

Though they have similar clock speeds, Transmeta chips perform a little better than Intel's, Howe said.

Speedier mobile chips are closing the performance gap between laptops and desktops. The fastest of Intel's Pentium 4 desktop chips run at 1.5 GHz, and the company is expected to release that chip for notebooks sometime in 2002.

"Over the last several years, mobile growth has exceeded that of the overall PC industry," said Intel's Frank Spindler. "One of the reasons is that we're providing the sort of performance levels on notebooks that rival the fastest desktops."

Intel, the world's largest chip maker, has been hurt by the slowing economy and declining demand for its showcase Pentium chips. The company announced it would delay a planned $250 million expansion to its chip-making plant in Massachusetts, and also delayed for the second time the opening of a plant in Ireland.

Last week, announcing that first-quarter sales would drop 25 percent from fourth-quarter results, the company said it would cut 5,000 jobs.

Notebook Makers Unleash 1GHz Blitz

Notebook processors hit 1GHz on Monday, just about a year after Intel and Advanced Micro Devices released their first 1GHz desktop chips.

As expected, Compaq Computer, Dell Computer, Gateway, Hewlett-Packard, IBM and a host of other computer makers introduced notebook models Monday that run on the new Intel mobile Pentium III chip.

Notebooks from major manufacturers based on AMD’s forthcoming 1GHz mobile Athlon chip are expected toward June.

Intel’s 1GHz mobile Pentium III comes at a time when notebooks are growing in importance for PC makers, as sales of the portables continue to grow more quickly than those of traditional desktop PC sales.

Many of the new 1GHz Pentium III notebooks will be full-size models. These machines generally offer large 15-inch screens, lots of RAM and hard-drive capacity, and space for extras such as DVD or CD-rewritable drives. Prices of the new models range from about $2,500 to $4,500, according to PC makers.

One challenge for Intel and PC makers alike in the designing the chip into notebooks is its heat generation and power consumption. But Intel says those considerations have not been major stumbling blocks, even though it has doubled maximum chip speeds in a year.

Computer makers have managed to squeeze the 1GHz chip into "thin and light" notebooks, said Don McDonald, director of marketing for Intel’s mobile products group.

Some 1GHz notebooks can also go for six hours on a single battery charge. These notebooks, though, use more battery cells than smaller mini-notebooks.

"You don’t need to look furtively and unplug the vending machine in airports," he said. "We’re delivering very battery friendly characteristics."

The 1GHz chips run on an average of less than 2 watts of power. However, the thermal envelope, or maximum wattage, comes to 24.8 watts, slightly higher than that of the 850MHz Pentium III, the company said.

Among the new notebooks:

- HP is using the 1GHz chip in its newest consumer model, the Pavilion N6395. That notebook will ship with a 15-inch display, 256MB of RAM, a 30GB hard drive and 8X DVD drive for $3,199. It weighs in at 5.8 pounds and is about 1 inch thick.

HP also is beefing up its corporate OmniBook 6000 notebook with the 1GHz chip and a 15-inch display. The OmniBook will sell for about $4,200.

- Dell’s new Latitude C800 model pairs the 1GHz chip with a 15-inch screen for a price starting at $2,459, according to the company. Dell is also planning to offer an Inspiron 8000 model with a similar configuration and price, geared toward consumers and small-business buyers.

- Toshiba announced a new Satellite Pro 4600, offering the 1GHz chip, a 15-inch screen and 128MB of RAM for about $3,000. The Tecra 8200 series, aimed at the corporate market, will offer the 1GHz chip with a 14-inch screen, 256MB of RAM, 20GB hard drive and a combination DVD/CD-RW drive for about $4,500.

- Compaq plans to offer several new notebooks based on the 1GHz chip. Its Armada E500, priced at $3,699, will feature a 15-inch display, 128MB of memory, 30GB hard drive, CD-RW drive and network card. The M700 packs a smaller 14-inch display, 128MB of RAM, 20GB hard drive, DVD drive and network card for $3,599.

- IBM also plans two new models, its ThinkPad A22 and A22p, which are expected to go on sale in mid-April. Prices will range from $1,999 to $4,169. The ThinkPad A22p, for example, will pack the 1GHz mobile chip with a 15-inch display, 32GB hard drive and CD-RW drive for $3,899.

Intel’s new 1GHz chip is readily available, unlike its earlier desktop counterpart.

"Product has been stocked in the channel," McDonald said. Intel started shipping samples of the 1GHz mobile chip in the fourth quarter.

Along with the 1GHz chip, Intel is shipping a 900MHz mobile Pentium III and a 750MHz mobile Celeron chip. However sources close to several manufacturers said they expect little to no demand for 900MHz models that will also come out Monday. HP, Dell and Toshiba will offer systems based on the chip.

Micron Electronics will likely be the sole PC maker to initially offer only the 900MHz mobile Pentium III. Its TransPort GX+ notebook will come with the 900MHz chip, a 15-inch display, a 30GB hard drive and 8x DVD for about $3,400. A 1GHz model is expected in the future.

U.S. Computer Firms Open E-Business Drive

Five of the world’s biggest computer companies launched a 27-city joint roadshow on Monday as major counterpunch in the fight to retain and extend their businesses.

Microsoft, Cisco Systems, Intel, Unisys and EMC said the marketing drive, called ‘‘Coping with the Unpredictable," focused on e-business infrastructures and would roll through Europe, the Middle East and Africa from March to May.

The roadshow that opened in Sweden will allow them to present customers with a unified view on how the five groups working together can offer combined solutions to customers’ e-business problems and could pave the way for more formal alliances, company officials said.

The roadshow highlights the latest trend of company alliances in a market that is maturing but also throwing up rapid change, vast quantities of data and unpredictable demand, said EMC Sweden country manager Per Hedlund.

‘‘The speed with which everything is happening these days means we need to show customers that the different parts of the industry are working together," Hedlund told Reuters.

‘‘Before, we saw two companies partnering or working together, but now it’s spread to four or five or more."

Gathering the resources of the partners would provide an authoritative view of their combined new technologies, said independent IT technology analyst Ian Bramley, managing director of UK firm Software Strategies.

With total 2000 revenues of $91 billion, profits of $24.6 billion and research and development of $11.5 billion, the partners represented a ‘‘formidable industry power," Bramley added.

‘‘The dot.com boom of early 2000 has now subsided. Today bricks and mortar enterprises are again resuming market leadership and the rewards of e-business success are as immense as the challenges are daunting," he said.

The five computer companies were seeking to present IT users with a unified perspective on how to meet e-business problems, said Unisys Sweden managing director Gunnar Hesse.

‘‘You have to be flexible in your infrastructure," Hesse told Reuters. ‘‘What we are all bringing together are the various pieces of the puzzle."

Alliances like the latest roadshow would continue to get bigger, probably leading to more formal corporate partnerships in the future, EMC’s Hedlund said.

Lycos Shuts Down Some Web Sites

Web portal Lycos said Monday that it mistakenly shut down an unknown number of Web sites through its Tripod Web hosting service during the weekend while cutting off customers who violated their service agreement.

Lycos spokeswoman Dorianne Almann said the company regularly shuts down sites for prohibited member conduct, including threats to minors, stalking, and racially or ethnically offensive material.

She said a number of sites that did not violate the agreement were also mistakenly shut down, but would be restored within 24 to 48 hours.

‘‘The pages that were removed on purpose were in direct violation," Almann said. But shutting down the other pages ‘‘was definitely not something we did on purpose."

Almann said sites operated through Lycos’ Angelfire site may also have been affected. She said she did not know how many sites were affected.

Lycos, owned by Spanish conglomerate Terra Lycos, is the fourth most visited digital media property, with over 32 million unique visitors last month, according to research by Media Metrix.

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